

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PRAGUE 03164 011251Z

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SUBJECT: GOC OFFICIAL REVIEWS AGRICULTURAL SITUATION

DEPT PASS AGRICULTURE FAS FOR G&F

REFS A. PRAGUE 2961,(NOTAL), B. PRAGUE 2041 (NOTAL)

1. AGATT MET TOMAN, DIRECTOR GENERAL IN FEDMINAG RESPONSIBLE FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, ON OCT 28 AND DISCUSSED LATEST DEVELOPMENT IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S AGRICULTURE. BELOW ARE MAJOR POINTS MADE BY TOMAN.

2. EVER SINCE THE APPRAISAL GIVEN BY TOMAN TO AGATT LAST JULY (REF B), SITUATION IN CZECHOSLOVAK AGRICULTURE HAS BEEN IMPROVING. EVEN JAN BARYL'S LATEST GRAIN ESTIMATE FOR 1976 (REF A) NOW APPEARS TO BE ON THE LOW SIDE. 1976 HARVEST OF GRAIN WAS SECOND HIGHEST ON RECORD EXCEEDED ONLY BY THE RECORD CROP OF 1974. BOTH WHEAT AND BARLEY CROPS WERE SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN LAST YEAR, BUT PRODUCTION OF CORN, DUE TO THE PROLONGED HEAT WAVE, WILL BE SHORT OF THE HOPED FOR GOAL. BUT AS TOMAN SAID "THIS DOES NOT BOTHER US ANYMORE, BECAUSE THE U.S. HAS ALREADY TAKEN CARE OF OUR CORN SHORTAGE". HE WAS REFERRING TO THE LATEST CZECHOSLOVAK CORN PURCHASES FROM THE U.S. (SEPTTEL).

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PAGE 02 PRAGUE 03164 011251Z

3. POTATO CROP IS ALSO TURNING OUT BETTER THAN EXPECTED. IT APPEARS THAT THE COUNTRY WILL MEET ITS PRODUCTION TARGET AND COVER TO A LARGE EXTENT ITS DOMESTIC NEEDS. HE EXPECTS AN AVERAGE YIELD OF 180 TONS PER HECTARE, UP FROM EARLIER ESTIMATE OF 150 TONS PER HECTARE.

4. SUGAR BEET CROP, HOWEVER, IS GOING TO BE SHORT OF EXPECTED GOALS, BECAUSE OF SMALL SIZE OF THE BEET. NEVERTHELESS, THIS YEAR'S CROP HAS HIGHER SUGAR CONTENT AND THEREFORE TOMAN HOPES SUGAR PRODUCTION WILL MATCH LAST YEAR'S.

5. RAPE SEED IS THE ONLY MEANINGFUL OIL SEED CROP IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, AND RESULTS THIS YEAR EXCEEDED LAST YEAR'S PRODUCTION. TOMAN BELIEVES THAT EXPERIMENTS WITH OTHER OIL SEED CROPS SUCH AS SOYBEAN AND SUNFLOWER SEEDS ARE A WASTE OF EFFORT AND THAT THE COUNTRY WOULD DO BETTER TO CONCENTRATE ON CORN PRODUCTION INSTEAD.

6. LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION IS MEETING ITS TARGET. INITIAL PRODUCTION DIFFICULTIES WHICH DEVELOPED AS A RESULT OF SHORTAGES OF FODDER AND FEED DURING THE SUMMER HAVE ALREADY BEEN LARGELY OVERCOME. PRESENT SUPPLIES OF FODDER AND GRAINS ARE ADEQUATE, AND PRODUCTION OF MEAT WILL SATISFY GROWING DOMESTIC DEMANDS.

7. SOME PROBLEMS PERSIST IN PRODUCTION OF VEGETABLES. EXISTENCE OF TOO MANY SMALL PRODUCTION UNITS PREVENTS APPLICATION OF MACHINERY, AND WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT, THIS SECTOR IS PLAGUED WITH LABOR SHORTAGE. HE SAID VEGETABLE PROBLEM SHOULD BE SOLVED BY THE END OF THE CURRENT 5-YEAR PLAN (1976-80) WHEN MORE AND MORE LARGE SCALE PRODUCTION UNITS WILL BE BROUGHT INTO PRODUCTION.

8. CZECHOSLOVAK FRUIT CROP, PARTICULARLY PEACHES AND APRICOTS, WAS HARD HIT BY EARLY FREEZES. APPLE CROP, HOWEVER, IS VERY GOOD AND WILL EXCEED BY WIDE MARGIN VOLUME OF LAST YEAR'S CROP.

9. TOMAN ALSO COMMENTED ON FOOD PRICES. HE STATED FAULTY THAT FOOD PRICES WILL REMAIN STABLE. RECENT DOUBLING OF PRICE OF POTATOES HAS LITTLE SIGNIFICANCE, HE SAID, SINCE EVEN AT PRESENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 PRAGUE 03164 011251Z

LEVELS THEY ARE STILL ONLY ONE-TENTH OF PRICES PREVAILING IN WESTERN EUROPE.

10. COMMENT: TOMAN'S OPTIMISTIC APPRAISAL OF THE AGRICULTURE SITUATION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA COMES AT A TIME OF WIDE SPREAD RUMORS OF PENDING PRICE RISES FOR SUGAR AND FLOUR AND INADEQUATE MEAT SUPPLIES. HOWEVER, WE HAVE NO GROUNDS TO QUESTION TOMAN'S WORDS. SO FAR HIS APPRAISAL OF THE AGRICULTURAL

SITUATION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA HAS PROVEN TO BE QUITE ACCURATE.
BYRNE

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